

2022-2023 Year-End Committee Report

| | |
|-----------------------|---|
| Committee: | Educational Affairs |
| Charge: | To recommend best practices in academic organization, research, and teaching in order to shape the Northwestern educational experience. |
| Chair: | Jill Hardin Wilson |
| # of Meetings: | 5 |

Completed Business and/or Accomplishments

The Educational Affairs Committee met five times during AY 2022-2023, with one meeting in Fall quarter, and two meetings in each of Winter and Spring quarters. These meetings were supplemented with occasional email correspondence.

- The Committee reviewed and revised a resolution submitted by Monica Prasad, Professor of Sociology, to increase admission and support of community college students. This work began in Spring 2022 under the leadership of then-chair Carol Heimer. The Committee met with Prof. Prasad and Prof. Mark Witte, who sponsored the resolution, to understand more clearly the goals and desired outcomes of the resolution. The Committee Chair also spoke with Chris Watson, Dean of Undergraduate Enrollment and Associate Vice President for Student Outreach, to learn more about challenges for community college transfer students and for Northwestern in admitting and supporting those students. Ultimately the resolution presented to the full Senate focused on better data collection around transfer admissions and transfer experience; staff support for improved advising and credit articulation for transfer students; and improved processes and shortened timeline for evaluating, articulating, and posting transfer equivalencies.
- The Committee met with Assistant Provost for University Records and University Registrar Jaci Casazza to discuss plans to reimagine CTECs. Building on work from the Reimagining CTECs Committee charged in 2018, a recent working group has developed a pilot survey instrument to test in the coming academic year. The working group intends to conduct focus groups with stakeholder groups, followed by a pilot of the new survey in Fall 2023 undergraduate courses. A summary of the planned work was presented to the Senate on May 10, 2023. Comments from that discussion, discussions of this Committee, and individual faculty communications were summarized and shared with the University Registrar. Some such summary comments can be found at the end of this report.
- The Chair represented Faculty Senate on the University Assessment and Accreditation Council. The Chair also met with several potential liaisons for the Committee to begin establishing relationships and understand what issues might come before the Committee now or in the near future:

- Miriam Sherin, Associate Provost for Undergraduate Education
- Kelly Mayo, Associate Provost for Graduate Education and Dean of The Graduate School
- Jennifer Keys, Senior Director, Searle Center for Advancing Learning and Teaching
- Lina Eskew, Assistant Director of Equitable Assessment, Searle Center for Advancing Learning and Teaching

Unfinished/Continuing Business

- A resolution was forward to the Committee by Senator Mark Witte requesting an investigation and discussion of grading practices and norms in undergraduate courses campuswide. The Committee discussed and raised a number of questions which could not reasonably be investigated and addressed before the end of the academic year. The resolution was tabled until Fall 2023, and will be forwarded to the next Chair. There is some indication that the Provost's Office may begin a review of grade distribution data in Summer 2023.
- The Committee should continue to monitor progress on CTEC reform to ensure that concerns raised in recent conversations are heard and addressed.

Summary of CTEC Feedback

- Some faculty are very interested in participating in focus groups, and would like more information on when those are planned.
- Several senators raised pointed concerns about giving both instruments to all students in pilot courses because of order effects. They are especially concerned that this will invalidate any conclusions one might draw from the results of the pilot. One suggestion was to randomize which students in a section get each instrument, rather than administering both surveys to all students.
- Senators are overall unclear about the purpose of the new survey instrument. They understand that we are trying to satisfy the needs of many stakeholders, but it leaves us with the question of what the new survey IS trying to accomplish. Students are asked to evaluate their learning experience, but it is not clear how it will help faculty improve teaching, how it will help future students, nor how it will be useful for P&T or teaching award nominations. They also note that the current working group does not include any students or faculty.
- Questions were raised about the usefulness of the new instrument for P&T. NTE teaching-track faculty are concerned about the lack of an overall rating, and how teaching might be evaluated in its absence, given that their responsibilities are largely teaching and there are no other systemic methods of review.
- Teaching-track faculty have also expressed concern about the impacts of allowing students who have been found responsible for integrity violations to provide review via CTECs. Conversely, some have expressed that it would be helpful to allow students who have

withdrawn from a class to submit comments so that we can understand more about why they dropped.

- Several senators lamented the lack of qualitative feedback via open response questions. They suggest that open response helps identify bias, whereas bias in scaled questions is likely to go undetected. They also raised questions about whether and how the new revision actually removes bias.
- Other suggestions:
 - Review evaluations of graduate-student instructors before they are released to the graduate student to identify and remove inappropriate comments. Alternatively/additionally, provide guided review and more active support to both graduate students and junior faculty in reacting to and removing inappropriate comments.
 - Increase response rates by requiring students to submit evaluations to gain access to final grades for the quarter, as some other institutions do.